

ORIGINAL

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September 19, 1996

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Ms. Susan Propper  
Office of the General Counsel  
Federal Election Commission  
999 E Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20463

Supplement to  
AOR 1996-41

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FEDERAL ELECTION  
COMMISSION  
OFFICE OF GENERAL  
COUNSEL

Re: A.H. Belo Corporation Advisory Opinion Request

Dear Ms. Propper:

This letter is submitted in response to your facsimile of September 16, 1996 (copy attached) requesting clarification of the proposal by A.H. Belo Corporation ("Belo") to air a series of television programs on which candidates for the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate and for state office will be given the opportunity to respond to questions concerning their candidacies. The responses are as follows:

**QUESTION:** How will responsibilities for producing these programs be divided between Belo and PBS affiliates?

(a) For example, who will pay the costs of producing the television programs - Belo stations, PBS affiliates, or will the costs be shared and, if so, by whom?

(b) Who will prepare the question to be asked of the candidates? will any candidates or their agents have input into the nature of phrasing of the question? Will the "news division interviewer" who poses the question be an employee of a Belo station or of PBS?

(c) Have the local PBS affiliates already agreed to participate in this program?

**RESPONSE:** (a) Belo will provide the facilities for taping the candidates' statements and will pay the costs of producing the television programs. The Belo and PBS stations in each market will, of course, provide airtime for broadcast of the programs. (b) The question to be asked of the candidates will be prepared by the Belo news division staff, with input from PBS staff. No candidates or their agents will be

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involved in formulating the question. The news division interviewer will be a Belo employee. (c) The local PBS affiliates in each of the markets involved have already agreed to participate.

**QUESTION:** Will all the candidates for a particular office be present at the same time during the taping, or will segments be taped separately? Will the candidates have an opportunity to respond to statements made by their opponents?

**RESPONSE:** Candidates' segments will be taped separately, at times arranged individually by Belo with each of the various candidates. Candidates will not have the opportunity to hear other candidates' answers before they make their own statements, nor will they be provided time to respond.

**QUESTION:** There will be many candidates for certain House seats in Dallas and Houston. Does Belo plan to choose only two of those candidates for each seat or will it select more than two in some races? How will Belo decide which candidates to include in these instances?

**RESPONSE:** Belo will not arbitrarily limit the number of candidates who may appear to two per district. Belo will, however, apply neutral selection criteria so that serious and newsworthy candidates are featured. As indicated in its initial Request, Belo will establish, in advance, objective criteria which will then be used to determine which candidates will be invited to respond to questions. This pre-existing objective criteria will not be limited to nomination by a major party, but will include indicia of public support and possibility of election.

**QUESTION:** If an invited candidate declines to participate, will Belo still prepare a program featuring the remaining candidate(s) for that office? Are there circumstances under which Belo would not produce a program for a particular office?

**RESPONSE:** Belo anticipates that invited candidates will want to participate in the program. In an exercise of its editorial judgment, Belo has already determined that answers by candidates in this interview format will be newsworthy. This format is not a debate requiring at least two candidates, but rather a news program. Therefore, Belo anticipates that its stations will include in the program the responses of any and all participating candidates, noting if necessary that others were offered an opportunity to participate in the program but were unable to do so. This is similar, of course, to the programming decisions made by such television news

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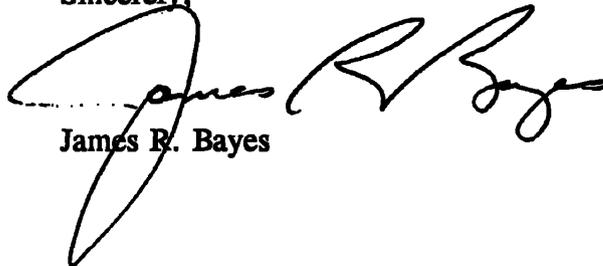
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programs as the Sunday morning interview presentations, except that in this instance all candidates meeting the pre-existing objective criteria will be provided with an opportunity to participate if they choose to do so.

I hope the foregoing information answers your questions concerning the Belo proposal. Please do not hesitate to call me at 429-7064, or Allison Hayward at 429-4259, with any other questions you may have.

In light of the time necessary to organize candidate participation in these programs, Belo would greatly appreciate consideration of this advisory opinion request by the Commission at the earliest possible opportunity. As a practical matter, in order to proceed with this program Belo stations will need to begin preparations no later than the first week of October.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James R. Bayes". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end of the last name.

James R. Bayes

**Questions on AOR submitted by A.H. Belo Corp.**

**1) How will responsibilities for producing these programs be divided between Belo and PBS affiliates?**

**(a) For example, who will pay the costs of producing the television programs - Belo, PBS affiliates, or will the costs be shared and, if so, by whom?**

**(b) Who will prepare the question to be asked of the candidates? Will any candidates or their agents have input into the nature or phrasing of the question? Will the "news division interviewer" who poses the question be an employee of a Belo station or of PBS?**

**(c) Have the local PBS affiliates already agreed to participate in this program?**

**2) Will all the candidates for a particular office be present at the same time during the taping, or will segments be taped separately? Will the candidates have an opportunity to respond to statements made by their opponents?**

**3) There will be many candidates for certain House seats in Dallas and Houston. Does Belo plan to choose only two of those candidates for each seat or will it select more than two in some races? How will Belo decide which candidates to include in these instances?**

**4) If an invited candidate declines to participate, will Belo still prepare a program featuring the remaining candidate(s) for that office? Are there circumstances under which Belo would not produce a program for a particular office?**